

A STORY OF JESSUP THOMAS

Written by the Fish & Game in 1954

Jessup Thomas, the son of a pioneer family, was born in Heber City, Wasatch County, on October 6, 1878. Young Thomas was left an orphan at the age of seven; but coming from a large family of eleven, there were older brothers and sisters to take care of him. Even though the caring hands of older brothers and sisters kept the fires of family life burning, life was not easy. The economy of this family, like the communities of the western frontier of that time, was not stable. Settlers were just beginning to dig in by building homes, breaking up farm lands, constructing irrigation systems and establishing the livestock industry, which later was to become an important part in the life of Jessup Thomas.

Young Jessup was only exposed to an education, for it was a long hike each day to the school house located four miles from his home. Early spring and late fall work took him out of school, as did very often the heavy snow of inclement winter days. So, for these reasons he received only an "inoculation" to schooling.

At the age of fourteen he was introduced to the work that he was to follow the rest of his life. He began to herd sheep. His first job, which was for George Coleman, took him into the area of Tooele. For two years he helped care for the Coleman flocks. Summer and winter ranges were not far apart in those days, the summer range being in the vicinity of Grantsville, where the lush desert grasses and shrubs furnished an abundance of food. The wintering grounds were not far distant.

After two years on the ranges with the Coleman flocks, young Jessup joined John Austin and for twelve years stayed with the sheep the larger part of the year. The sheep were summered in the area that is known as Current Creek in Wasatch County and on the West Fork of the Duchesne River and trailed to the wintering ground near Dugway and Keg Mountains in Western Utah. Sometimes they were wintered in the area east and south of Myton in Duchesne County. Thomas claims to have ridden all the ranges from the Green River west to Heber City and then into the desert ranges in the western part of the state.

When asked how he compared the forage on the ranges in the early days with that which we find today he said, "Well, I will tell you like I have told others. How does it look before and after you cut a hay field? Many times I snagged my horses on the branches of trees that had fallen under the thick growth. Often I had to take my pack horses and make trails through the heavy vegetation in Currant Creek before I could get my sheep to the destination. There are a lot of washes and gulleys there now that were not there when I first began to ride the

*Tabiona & Hanna Book
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"Sheep, sheep, the G-- D-- sheep. How many does your permit call for? I told him and he said, 'well, that's just what you have.'"

This old timer, who is not as old as many we have talked to, has lived a hard rugged life. The dangers he encountered on the range were added to by some Indians and Mexicans who were hard to get along with. He related

while he was sitting on the side of a hill tending a Mexican herder came by and upon seeing his dog he got off his horse and began firing at it. Thomas jumped up and after using a few well chosen expletives asked him why he was trying to shoot his dog. The man replied, "Because I want to and I am going to do it too." With this he whirled around and aimed at Thomas, who yelled back and said, "What are you going to do, shoot me and leave me up on this hill without even a coat?" The Mexican jumped on the ground and was never seen in that part of the country.

He also related that on another occasion an Indian named Willy Jack visited him at camp. "He was invited to stay when he left my best saddle horse disappeared to the spot where I had him tethered and prints of Indian mocassins which strongly indicated that the Indian had ridden away with the horse. I lay I rode to his camp but no one was at the camp to save an Indian maiden. She spoke English and stated that the Indian had not stolen my horse. The fact that I had not mentioned the horse being stolen from the Indian maiden was conclusive evidence that the Indian had taken it. I tried for some time to get it back but it was more than a year, and then with the help of an Indian named Ab Murdock, that I finally recovered the fields near what is now Tabiona.

From what Jessup Thomas has contributed to the livestock industry, he has also endeared himself in the hearts of all who have known him. Besides raising two sons of his own (he remarried after his first wife died and started a young family to raise), he also gave several daughters and girls the comforts of his home, afforded them the necessary things of life, and helped them to find vocations.

He said he has never turned an individual down who needed help, and it is known that he has loaned money to people who asked for it when they stated their real needs. Because of his kindness and the helping hand he has always extended, hundreds of western people love and admire him. He would speak ill of this Old Timer.

Thomas is retired now, but the comforts of his home in Tabiona are open wide to the passer-by, as a hitch string on the pioneer cabin and the flap of his tent.

By Orson M. Allen
2-2-70

It May Concern:

Orson M. Allen Declare this statement to be true in the Bridger Jim Ditch, located to the west and north of the townsite of Tabiona, Utah.

He came to the Tabiona area in 1911 along with my father. We stayed at the home of Arthur Maxwell. While we stayed with them for a few days we helped them put their second crop of hay up. This field was irrigated from the Bridger Jim Ditch. They told us at the time that this ditch was in existence at the time they homesteaded the place in 1905. The Indians that were there had plots of ground that they were irrigating from this ditch.